

PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

JULY 19, 2016

A meeting of the Planning and Economic Development Committee was held on Tuesday, July 19, 2016, at 7:09 p.m. in the Aldermanic Chamber.

Alderwoman Mary Ann Melizzi-Golja, Chair, presided.

Members of Committee present: Alderman-at-Large Daniel T. Moriarty, Vice Chair
 Alderman-at-Large Brian S. McCarthy
 Alderman Tom Lopez (Arrived at 7:25 p.m.)
 Alderman Benjamin M. Clemons

Also in Attendance: Ms. Sarah Marchant, Director of Community Development
 Mr. Tim Cummings, Director of Economic Development

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Richard Lannan

MaryLou Blaisdell and myself are from the Downtown Improvement Committee and we saw some e-mails and we are trying to clarify the budget for our committee but Sarah kind of cleared it up. Obviously our committee has pledged in our budget from the last fiscal year I guess to fund \$25,000 and the committee is very much in favor of this and would love to see it move forward. Hopefully the Alderman will approve this so they can do their job for the second phase which is a little bit different and our committee and me personally is very much behind this.

DISCUSSION

Performing Arts Center: Phase II, Next Steps

COMMUNICATIONS

From: Tim Cummings, Economic Development Division Director

Re: Discussion on Moving Forward with Performing Arts Center Feasibility Study Phase II

MOTION BY ALDERMAN MCCARTHY TO RECOMMEND FINAL PASSAGE

MOTION CARRIED

Mr. Cummings

I would like to take a moment to quickly go over the memo that's in front of you where essentially the exercise and the objective that I am hoping to achieve tonight is to make sure that we have a consensus around the phase II scope of work that has been promulgated. I outlined the background as of today as I understand the Performing Arts Center topic and an issue has been broken down into two different contracts. Contract one has been completed and there was some conclusions and recommendations made by the consultant. Essentially it outlined three ways to move forward. The first was a partnership with a college or university on the development of a new downtown arts center, the development of a downtown meeting events and music center and thirdly, the development of an art's district. That feasibility study cost approximately \$22,000 and I believe that has been 100% paid for to date. We are now at a point where I am hoping to get some additional clarity as to the direction that folks want to go. There's a couple of outstanding issues at hand but I think it's important to bring those outstanding issues before you this evening because I believe it backs into the scope of the phase II and to make sure that we accurately craft a phase II scope. You have in front of you Duncan

Webb, our consultants, draft II scope which has come in at \$27,000 and it essentially outlines two major components; a business plan with operating projection cost estimates for implementation a program, capital expenses and basic physical plans and it's broken down into two parts that will run together simultaneously which is the outlining of a preliminary business plan as well as our physically planning exercise that will go into the building of the program. There are three or four major issues that I want to make sure that we have a discussion on so that there is clear direction for me and ultimately the consultant. One is financial and making sure we understand what the potential financial matters that may be that surround this issue. The vision in terms of the operational management and how this city would like to potentially see the Performing Arts Center managed; the day to day governance. Citizen engagement to make sure you understand the level of citizen engagement that may be necessary down the line but not as prevalent right now but I think it would be important to undertake such an exercise of such a large capital and financial expense and then the smaller issue of making sure that you understand that the scope that came in at \$27,000 which is slightly higher than the funding source that was identified at \$25,000 and I'm sure that we can work through that issue by pairing it back or looking to find other sources of revenue. Also I wanted to make sure that we are clear on how we handle Keefe Auditorium. Being a little bit newer here in the city, my sense is that until there is some sort of jurisdictional understanding or control with the Board of Aldermen that we really shouldn't be pursuing the looking of Keefe Auditorium for this particular purpose. The instructions I want to make sure that I clearly convey to the consultants, that's my understanding is the wish so I just want to make sure I am clear on that before I proceed too much further.

Alderman Moriarty

Regarding Keefe did you say should or should not?

Mr. Cummings

Should not.

Alderman Moriarty

Should not pursue Keefe as a solution to any of those three?

Mr. Cummings

That's correct.

Chairwoman Melizzi-Golja

I know that at our last meeting, we had talked to the Board of Education and I guess my take away from that is that people wanted to pursue something with the Board of Education but at the same time move forward while we were looking at where to go with it.

Alderman McCarthy

I think Alderman Clemons had suggested that we contact the Board of Education but I don't know if he has done that or not. I am not inclined to pursue Keefe if we are going to have jurisdictional disputes over programmatic use. It's not a good business decision to invest in something you can't control when it's done.

Alderman Moriarty

There are some ideas of a low cost modification or improvements to Keefe. Under what mechanism anyone can offer would we get some sort of a rough architectural concept and cost. It wouldn't be a bad thing if this

was able to do that. I am not strongly advocating it but somehow or another it would be nice to get something more than just an idea.

Mr. Cummings

I struggled with that very issue and I keep going back to what is the goal of the exercise and what are we trying to achieve. Are we trying to achieve a Performing Arts Center and what does that program actually look like and Keefe may be a plausible low cost alternative and would it necessarily be functional for the market place, I don't know because the report that Duncan Webb put together seems to suggest that really the type of facility that may have some strength within the private market is more of a flexible meeting type space up to 500 seats. I haven't seen Keefe so I can't speak to the logistics of it but my sense is that it just doesn't qualify for meeting the recommendations as outlined. That was one of the reasons I set it aside and then coupled with what I have heard from feedback from various parties in terms of the jurisdictional issues. It seemed to make sense that setting it aside at least for now to advance the conversation was the most expedient way to move this project forward. I'm happy to have that conversation with the Board if that is the desire of this committee. I haven't had that conversation with the Board of Education and I think if you want to include Keefe you should have that conversation and then I would come back to you.

Alderman McCarthy

I don't think we are going to get them to give it up which means we are not going to fix the control issue. I don't think the facility comes close to matching what the consultant has told us we want to use for our Performing Arts Center. There were some interesting discussions about how to downsize Keefe somewhat. It's a beautiful 1,500 seat auditorium with no lobby and four toilet stalls which is a real issue when you use the facility. Substantial changes would need to be made and I don't think that will get us closer to having the facility that we want. There is this real dichotomy there with regard to, particularly the symphony, who wants to use Keefe but I don't see a way to spend the same dollars to fix Keefe for the symphony and to meet the vision of the Performing Arts Center at the same time.

Alderman Moriarty

I certainly agree. After seeing the presentation I came to the same conclusion that the focus of something new should be something smaller; half the size of Keefe. I don't dispute that at all but I'm sort of wondering out loud whether it's possible to piggyback an exploratory additional effort whether it's cost effective and if these are the right people to even do that. Maybe it's a question better suited for an architectural firm.

Mr. Cummings

Just to clarify, we do have an architectural firm involved so this would be the appropriate avenue to take if Keefe is of the priority of this committee. I would simply say that yes, we can absolutely expand the scope but we will have an associated extension of the cost. I have been trying to work within the budget that was given to me as I understood it to be but absolutely if you ultimately want to include Keefe then I think that is something that could be done but we would need to find the money to do that.

Chairwoman Melizzi-Golja

I think that the other takeaway based on public comment and comment at our meetings was that looking at this whole option of the art's district and where do we put our resources there and if we are looking at developing some sort of smaller facility and maybe even eventually integrating in Keefe what does that look like and what would an initial art's district look like and then as we grow how would we grow it and what would the plan need to be for that. We are kind of spreading the wealth and are there things we need to do in terms of use of buildings and spaces and green spaces so it has the feel that it is connected with businesses that might be there.

Mr. Cummings

To that point, I actually had that conversation with the consultant, Duncan Webb and what this scope would be buying you. It's essentially some case studies and some good examples of other arts districts within the country. I think we all understand in terms of downtown revitalization that we are in support of cultural assets and the arts is a great way to move your downtown forward. I think what Duncan Webb will do is articulate what have been some of the goals and objectives undertaken by other communities of like size and show to us as a way of helping us start the conversation of an arts district; ultimately my understanding is that we would have to engage in somewhat of a lengthy citizen engagement exercise which in this scope doesn't necessarily contemplate and I wanted to make sure that we clarified that.

Chairwoman Melizzi-Golja

Okay so this scope does not do that?

Mr. Cummings

It does not.

Alderman McCarthy

So does the scope for the second part primarily deal with the operating model and the cost and not with the design because I had mentioned that I thought it was important to do the site selection at some point and perhaps have the consultant involved in that? If we are not looking at the actual design yet that might not be as necessary.

Mr. Cummings

It's a two-prong approach that's running in tandem. The physically planning of the program will actually occur in tandem with the business plan; both will need to inform one another. My understanding is right now is the internal exercise in terms of the internal programming and what will be necessary. That will occur based off of the feedback of the operational needs.

Alderman McCarthy

Right, if the deliverable is you need 100 seats in a 300 foot space and a 700 seat space and a kitchen that will accommodate "X" and whatever that's all stuff that we can do prior to thinking about what the facility actually looks like and I think that's probably a good thing to have. I think if we just have that program inventory that will generate a square foot number at least that will give us a ballpark for a cost and then when we look at sites we are much more free to figure out what will fit. The one thing that I would ask for to make that easier is that when we get that programmatic description we need to understand the relationships between different spaces and what they are used for so we have the right number of bathrooms for the spaces and the kitchens in the right places.

Chairwoman Melizzi-Golja

I think that's broadly addressed under the physical planning, the site evaluation. It talks about listing the pros and cons for each option and looking at the condition. My other piece about this is if you look under the preliminary business plan, if we are talking about also an arts district then looking at what the goals are for that and making sure that we don't just become focused on facilities and leave the arts district out. It's outlined here that I think it's important to also look at that because I think that if we are going to talk about arts and arts district then the sustainability of that is important too.

Alderman Moriarty

For some reason, Director Cummings, it sounded like you said there were three things that we were going to do but again reading the contract it is all coming back to me. There's really two parts, there's the physical planning part and then there is the business plan which is the functional use and cost and stuff.

Mr. Cummings

That's correct.

Alderman Moriarty

You mentioned three?

Chairwoman Melizzi-Golja

Those are the outlined options.

Mr. Cummings

So in the previous phase of this plan the consultant made three recommendations, partner with a college or university on the development of a new downtown arts center, develop a downtown meeting events and music center and then thirdly develop an arts district. My sense is that as we build out the business plan and we are looking to build out the program and the physical planning we will be looking at option two and option two is really going to drive the conversation, and I don't want to speak for anyone but that's my sense of how this is evolving. I think that clarification really needs to be included.

Alderman Moriarty

Okay so of the three options by going by the path of option two which is to develop a downtown meeting and events and music center the work effort will be in two parts, the physical planning and the business planning?

Mr. Cummings

That's correct.

Ms. Marchant

The business plan does include the beginnings of helping us kick-off an arts district. The beginnings of those key studies and other options and things we can think about within the context of it but it is not going to lay out or go through the community input process to lay all of that out for us, that will be a continuation of this. It's just the start of that conversation.

Alderman Moriarty

So given that how did we, whoever we is, how did we eliminate options one and three?

Mr. Cummings

Just to be clear "we" did not eliminate options one and three. I think option three is still on the table and being discussed. I think if you want to develop a scope around option three and that is part of the reason I wanted to have this conversation tonight because this was the scope that was presented and I wanted to make sure that there was an understanding of what we were buying. I think if we want to pursue a different scope from the

consultant that looks more at an arts district then we could definitely do that but I wanted to make sure that folks understood that what we would be getting today under this current scope is a very high level, basic understanding of what a good arts district would entail and look like with some directives on how we could achieve that.

Alderman Lopez

I'm confused because I thought that the presentation favored the arts district more than the other two options. I thought because it was cost effective that was the direction that the consultant was representing as the most immediate achievable one.

Ms. Marchant

I think that what the consultant was representing was that was a new idea option that we should think as the big scale but it wasn't in lieu of not doing this other thing. It wasn't not building a facility it was just making sure that in doing that we were thinking of the big picture and how it would fit into the larger arts community that exists and is growing and thriving here.

Mr. Cummings

The arts district will give you the overall conversation and then the Performing arts center would be an anchor to help drive the redevelopment of ultimately the downtown and the arts district overall.

Alderman Lopez

Well as long as we are pursuing option three or part of it because my concern is that if we focus on option two and then postulate about option three to get a better sense of what it could be or how it happened. If you physically locate option two not in an area identified as a district area then you have created an extra step for yourself.

Mr. Cummings

You make a very fair point. I think that understanding that the Performing Arts Center is going to be an anchor or a catalyst; it's going to be a core component of the arts district. I think that overall there is an understanding as to where the Performing Arts Center should go in this city and that's my understanding as I have been orientating into this community and that is that it should be in the downtown so developing an arts district within the downtown would achieve that geographic boundary goal. To answer your question specifically, the study at hand speaks about building an arts district essentially from Hunt to Keefe essentially anchoring it like a dumb bell on both ends.

Chairwoman Melizzi-Golja

As I am reading under the preliminary business plan, define goals and practices, (inaudible) the vision and operating goals for recommended facilities property and an arts district covering such areas that can support the local arts groups sustainable operations supporting economic and downtown development and maximizing community benefits.

Alderman Lopez

But they had specific regions that they were looking at and I think they had a map which had density area of similarly minded businesses or venues and respectfully I think there will be a large debate coming our way as to which side to put that on; whether it be near the library and existing Performing Arts Center or over by the

Keefe Auditorium. I think it would be good to have a clear idea of where we are going to go before we open it up to that kind of a debate which could derail the whole process.

Mr. Cummings

Just to add additional color to that point, I think we are going to have to understand that we are living within two constraints, the private sector and we are really only going to be able to find a site based on what is readily available within the market and then to the economics and that's part of the reason why I wanted to have that conversation this evening and that's to make sure that we had an understanding of what the economics may or may not be that are ultimately going to start driving some of these conversations. Based on those constraints we would then be able to find a site. I'm very sensitive to having a conversation. It's almost like you want to take two steps in advance and I'd rather have a programming conversation, I'd rather have a building out of the business plan that might help us get an order of magnitude and help us understand what ultimately we can and cannot do and then pursue what would be the best site available.

Alderman Moriarty

Another perspective is regarding the location or where we will have the arts district or where there will be an arts center, we have at least decided that its downtown. I think it does make sense to get a hard, specific physical planning option available so when we are trying to decide which side of Main Street or which block it's not totally hypothetical. Then if we have two options we can consider the sub-specifics of the location.

Alderman Lopez

The consultant already provided a lot of that information like when they were marking out ideal areas so whatever direction we take I would just make sure that the reasoning is very clear to the public and we don't progress too quickly before informing them of what strategies and priorities are taking place. We all know that the economics is a major factor but at the same time the populous is important because it's a Performing Arts Center and you have to make sure that the community actually buys into it. If people are grinding an axe because it wasn't put in the right place or they don't like the design of it or whatever; I mean we need the people to go to it too.

Mr. Cummings

So the civic engagement portion of this right now is limited and I want to make sure I am clear on that and there is going to be further conversations to be had but you are absolutely right. Once we get the basic understanding of the magnitude, business plan, program; we can then advance the conversation to something a little bit more site specific. I would suggest that if we look too site specific right now then we might be trying to jam a round peg into a square whole.

Chairwoman Melizzi-Golja

The site evaluations, the areas that were identified to be looked at were the Court Street Complex, the Alec's Shoe store building and the two open parking lot sites.

Mr. Cummings

I want to be abundantly clear that these are theoretical in concept. I would hate to leverage a business owner from the private sector to think that their price may change on the standing that the city may or may not have a desire to go in a certain direction. None of these sites are under any type of site control and I am very hesitant to put the city in an unfortunate position by focusing too much on one area without having these basic elements understood.

Alderman McCarthy

To put it another way, we probably own at least one place where this could be located so if anybody is listening who thinks they are going to get rich by cornering a site that we want to buy, it's not going to happen, we will just put it somewhere else. Having said that I just want point out that one of the economic impacts of siting it is as we all understand, these things don't fund themselves and require some amount of public/private partnership. If we were to site it at an interchange along the interstate it essentially generates no uplift in revenue that can compensate for the public portion of that funding so one of the constraints is it needs to go in a place where there is a believable understanding that it will improve property values around it and therefore generate the revenue that the city needs to make it work.

Alderwoman Melizzi-Golja

Director Cummings, with all of that discussion what questions to you still not have answers to?

Mr. Cummings

First and foremost, everyone is clear on the direction that we discussed thus far and I did not hear any resolution regarding Keefe. If Keefe is still on the table I would be happy to go back and speak with the consultant about amending their current draft scope.

Alderman McCarthy

I don't see anything that is going to lead us back to Keefe.

Alderman Lopez

The concerns I was raising earlier were actually because when you described the scope as Hunt to Keefe I was recalling the study saying that those were outlying areas so I guess now I understand a little bit better of what you are saying.

Alderman Moriarty

Regarding Keefe maybe that is a question better suited for the Joint Special School Building Committee.

Alderman McCarthy

The full school board still has to look at it because it is under the school board's jurisdiction.

Ms. Marchant

Can I make a recommendation that maybe we move this contract forward and if we do decide that is a priority we could talk to (inaudible) about piggybacking off of this contract to have that work done. But as the community has been asking for a very long time I would like to keep the momentum going and continue with this contract now which we have a majority of the funding.

Alderman Lopez

I completely agree with that.

MOTION BY ALDERMAN MORIARTY THAT THE PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE RECOMMENDS PROCEEDING WITH THE CONTRACT AS PRESENTED

ON THE QUESTION

Chairwoman Melizzi-Golja

This contract is looking at a price tag of \$27,000 and we have \$25,000 so do we want to see about working within that dollar range or do we want to go and look for additional funds.

Alderman McCarthy

I think that Director Cummings had suggested that additional funds were probably available somewhere in the escrows.

Mr. Cummings

That's right.

Alderman McCarthy

That will be a matter for the Finance Committee when the contract comes back.

MOTION CARRIED

UNFINISHED BUSINESS - None

NEW BUSINESS - None

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Alderman Moriarty

Recently I made a stop at the New Hampshire rest area in Hookset and it is a fine example of something that the state actually got right. I hope that whatever we accomplish here is as well executed as that job was.

Alderman McCarthy

I stopped there last Friday and I agree that it is probably a tremendous economic success based on the number of people that were in it. I would categorize it as a timing nightmare. It's got an intersection in the middle of it that is tangled that is a two-way stop with no clear right-of-way and there are no barriers or walkways to suggest where pedestrians ought to be and consequently they are everywhere.

Chairwoman Melizzi-Golja

I have been there and the one thing that is missing is all of the tourist information about Nashua but I know that there are some people who are looking at that.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Scott Aquilina, Principal, Bruner/Cott

I am the architect and I am part of the proposal that Director Cummings presented to you. I wanted to make a couple of comments. I wanted to make a comment about Keefe, I think Keefe services Symphony New Hampshire quite well and I think it could serve Symphony New Hampshire better in the future if the jurisdictional issues were addressed and monies were provided to renovate it. I think it could be renovated in a

moderate way or in a more holistic way but I think it's fundamentally wants to stay what it is because it meets the needs of the Symphony and the singers quite well. Johnathan McPhee, who is the conductor of Symphony New Hampshire, is also the conductor of the Lexington Symphony and they operate in a hall called the Cary Memorial Hall in Lexington, MA, that was renovated about three years ago. It's a very similar space which was optimized for them so hopefully in the future that could also happen for them. I don't think that given where this Duncan study is driving us, I don't think that Keefe solves the arts district issue or the music venue issue. I don't think that Keefe will ever be the music venue that he is envisioning which is much more of a multi-purpose venue and a community meeting place. I think it has to be separate and I think that is what the second phase will be looking at; what is the ideal template for that and what are the different pieces of that, meaning is there more than one venue, what are the sizes of the venue and what are the extra pieces like the kitchen and lobby, etc. and then taking a look at the template and applying it to different locations to see the pros and cons of its fit and its relationship to other businesses in downtown Nashua. I'm very optimistic about Keefe in the long-term to serve the purposes that are similar to the purposes that it is serving today but I don't think it is an event venue.

REMARKS BY THE ALDERMEN

POSSIBLE NON-PUBLIC SESSION

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION BY ALDERMAN _____ TO ADJOURN
MOTION CARRIED

The meeting was declared adjourned at 7:53 pm.

Alderman-at-Large Daniel T. Moriarty
Committee Clerk